

To Chairman Genachowski and whomever this may concern at the FCC,

Here are some suggestions for extending existing telecommunications relay services nationwide in relation to proposed TRS reimbursement rates for Fund Year 2010-2011. First, off now that the FCC is reclassifying broadband a telecommunications service to protect the Open Internet, the National Broadband Plan and implement universal access policies to fuel deployment and adoption of competitive, affordable broadband service I am very pleased your doing so but disappointed that your exempting the incumbent big cable and telecom ISPs from line sharing requirements.

First off I understand there are a number of different types of Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS's) I'll list them here followed by my proposal, an evaluation of who will benefit from this proposal, a review of the law, and legal feasibility. I also understand that there are mandatory minimum standards TRS providers must comply with set by the FCC.

There are several forms of TRS, depending on the particular needs of the user and the equipment available.

Text-to-Voice TTY-based TRS ? With this type of ?traditional? TRS, a person with a hearing or speech disability uses a special text telephone, called a TTY, to call the CA at the relay center. TTYs have a keyboard and allow people to type their telephone conversations. The text is read on a display screen and/or a paper printout. A TTY user calls a TRS relay center and types the number of the person he or she wishes to call. The CA at the relay center then makes a voice telephone call to the other party to the call, and relays the call back and forth between the parties by speaking what a text user types, and typing what a voice telephone user speaks.

Voice Carry Over - Voice Carry Over (VCO) is a type of TRS that allows a person with a hearing disability, but who wants to use his or her own voice, to speak directly to the called party and receive responses in text from the CA. No typing is required by the calling party. This service is particularly useful to senior citizens who have lost their hearing, but who can still speak.

Hearing Carry Over - Hearing Carry Over (HCO) is a type of TRS that allows a person with a speech disability, but who wants to use his/her own hearing, to listen to the called party and type his/her part of the conversation on a TTY. The CA reads these words to the called party, and the caller hears responses directly from the called party.

Speech-to-Speech (STS) Relay Service - This form of TRS is used by a person with a speech disability. A CA, who is specially trained in understanding a variety of speech disorders, repeats what the caller says in a manner that makes the caller's words clear and understandable to the called party. No special telephone is needed. For more information regarding STS visit

[www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/speechtospeech.html](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/speechtospeech.html).

**Shared Non-English Language Relay Services** - Due to the large number of Spanish speakers in the United States, the FCC requires interstate TRS providers to offer Spanish-to-Spanish traditional TRS. Although Spanish language relay is not required for intrastate (within a state) TRS, many states with large numbers of Spanish speakers offer this service on a voluntary basis. The FCC also allows TRS providers who voluntarily offer other shared non-English language interstate TRS, such as French-to-French, to be compensated from the federal TRS fund.

**Captioned Telephone Service** - Captioned telephone service, like VCO, is used by persons with a hearing disability but some residual hearing. It uses a special telephone that has a text screen to display captions of what the other party to the conversation is saying. A captioned telephone allows the user, on one line, to speak to the called party and to simultaneously listen to the other party and read captions of what the other party is saying. There is a ?two-line? version of captioned telephone service that offers additional features, such as call-waiting, \*69, call forwarding, and direct dialing for 911 emergency service. Unlike traditional TRS (where the CA types what the called party says), the CA repeats or re-voices what the called party says. Speech recognition technology automatically transcribes the CA?s voice into text, which is then transmitted directly to the user?s captioned telephone text display.

**Video Relay Service (VRS)** - This Internet-based form of TRS allows persons whose primary language is American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate with the CA in ASL using video conferencing equipment. The CA speaks what is signed to the called party, and signs the called party?s response back to the caller. VRS is not required by the FCC, but is offered by several TRS providers. VRS allows conversations to flow in near real time and in a faster and more natural manner than text-based TRS. Beginning January 1, 2006, TRS providers that offer VRS must provide it 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and must answer incoming calls within a specific period of time so that VRS users do not have to wait for a long time. For more information regarding VRS visit [www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/videorelay.html](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/videorelay.html).

**Internet Protocol (IP) Relay Service** ? IP Relay is a text-based form of TRS that uses the Internet, rather than traditional telephone lines, for the leg of the call between the person with a hearing or speech disability and the CA. Otherwise, the call is generally handled just like a TTY-based TRS call. The user may use a computer or other web-enabled device to communicate with the CA. IP Relay is not required by the FCC, but is offered by several TRS providers. For more information regarding IP Relay visit [www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/iprelay.html](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/iprelay.html).

**IP Captioned Telephone Service** ? IP captioned telephone service, one of the newest forms of TRS, combines elements of captioned telephone service and IP Relay. IP captioned telephone service can

be provided in a variety of ways, but uses the Internet ? rather than the telephone network ? to provide the link and captions between the caller with a hearing disability and the CA. It allows the user to simultaneously both listen to, and read the text of, what the other party in a telephone conversation is saying. IP captioned telephone service can be used with an existing voice telephone and a computer or other Web-enabled device without requiring any specialized equipment. For more information regarding IP captioned telephone service, visit [www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/ipcaptioned.html](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/ipcaptioned.html).

## 711 Access to TRS

Just as you can call 411 for information, you can dial 711 to connect to certain forms of TRS anywhere in the United States. Dialing 711 makes it easier for travelers to use TRS because they do not have to remember TRS numbers in every state. Because of technological limitations, however, 711 access is not available for the Internet-based forms of TRS (VRS and IP Relay).

Now in regard to the Telecommunications Relay Service or TRS here's what I propose:

I propose an extension of existing telecommunications relay service obligations including the obligation to contribute to the interstate relay fund that supports these services to all communication service providers including VOIP and cable providers that enable conversations to take place between two or more people.

Here is who will benefit:

There are currently 28-31 million Americans with hearing loss and several additional millions of persons with speech disabilities. Moreover, it is predicted that aging baby boomers will expand the population of people with hearing loss to 78 million by 2030. (Newsweek, 2005)[1] For a good portion of those people, TRS is and will be their only link to businesses, friends and family who use traditional phones. In addition, TRS-facilitated phone calls are regularly used by members of the general population to communicate with persons who have hearing and speech disabilities.

Current Law: Section 225 of the Communications Act (47 U.S.C. §225), as added by Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-336), requires common carriers to provide TRS nationwide. Among other things, this law requires carriers to make annual contributions based on their end-of-the-year revenues to a federally administered fund that supports the provision of these services (Interstate TRS Fund). It also requires all carriers to complete relay calls initiated by dialing 711 anywhere in the United States.

Why it is not enough: Although the vast majority of relay calls are now being handled over the

Internet, the actual requirement to provide TRS under Section 225 has not been extended to Internet-based communication providers. Specifically, the FCC has not yet exercised its ancillary jurisdiction to require VoIP or cable Internet providers who provide voice communication services to contribute to the Interstate TRS Fund. The recent decline in consumer reliance on traditional PSTN-based telephone services, coupled with a spiraling increase in the demand for innovative IP text and video based relay services, threaten to put funding support for relay services in jeopardy. If incumbent telephone wireline and wireless providers must contribute to the TRS Fund, then interconnected VoIP and cable providers should have to do so as well, in order to sustain the viability of the nation's interstate relay service program. The failure to impose relay obligations on VoIP providers has also meant that relay users cannot always use these services to access relay services through 711 dialing, a hardship for relay users.

**Legal Feasibility:** In June of 2006, the FCC used its ancillary jurisdiction to begin requiring VoIP services that interconnect with the public switched telephone network to contribute to the Universal Service Fund.[2] A similar obligation can and should be placed on VoIP and cable communication providers with respect to the Interstate TRS Fund. Similarly, these providers should have to comply with other relay obligations, including outreach obligations and the obligation to handle relay calls initiated by dialing 711.

[1] Many of these older Americans are likely to use a form of relay service called captioned telephone relay service, which allows people with residual hearing to both hear and read text of telephone responses. See <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/trs.html> for a complete description of all the types of TRS. Generally TRS uses a relay operator, called a communications assistant, to read text or interpret into sign language what the person with a disability types or signs to a hearing person, and to type or sign responses back from the hearing person. Complete confidentiality of relay calls is required under FCC regulations, and users of relay services cannot be charged extra for the cost of making relay calls above what voice users would pay to make a call of the same distance and duration.

[2] Report and Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, In the Matter of Universal Service Contribution Methodology, No. 90-571 (FCC June 27, 2006).

All of the above TRS services should benefit from some increased funding subsidies etc. All are tailored to suit different needs and uses. TRS services like Hearing Carry Over benefit people with speed therapy issues by providing them a way to communicate, Shared Non-English Language Relay Services are essential for the increasing number of Spanish speaking people in America -- so Spanish to Spanish TRS is also an essential TRS service, Video Relay Service provides Americans whose primary language is sign language a way to communicate while using their own hearing with communications assistants or CA's; Speech To Speech Relay Service is another type of TRS for

people with speech disability issues that works differently from Hearing Carry Over; indeed there are a number of different types of crucial TRS like Text To Voice for a hearing impaired or speech disable person to communicate etc. I know that in these tough fiscal times so many states are projecting budget deficits and the federal government has a huge deficit of its own -- vital services are being cut -- disability services in states, public transit service in my town etc that its hard to continue funding these things but TRS services are essential and I suggest a funding increase to TRS services to expand and improve the existing services offered.